

Mine to Protect by Carerra_os

Series: [Stommy Tumblr Stories \[3\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, First Kiss, Getting Together, M/M, Protective Tommy Hagan, jealous Tommy Hagan

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Carol Perkins, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Tommy Hagan

Relationships: Minor or Background Relationship(s), Robin Buckley/Carol Perkins, Tommy Hagan/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-03-01

Updated: 2021-03-01

Packaged: 2022-04-01 18:07:27

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,519

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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Tommy has always been protective of Steve. He looked at him when they were kids, Steve's face all scrunched up and wet as he looked for the cat stuffed animal he brought and subsequently lost on the first day of school, the one he offered to share with Tommy during nap time and he just knew he wanted to keep protecting Steve. Tommy had grabbed Steve's hand with a lispy "I'll help you look" and dragged him off to find the cat.

The lisp got worse when he lost his second front tooth during the struggle to take the cat back from a bigger boy and things had gotten bloody. Tommy did not care how angry their teacher was at them for fighting, nothing else mattered but Steve's tears drying up as he threw his pudgy arms around him declaring them best friends forever.

With Steve's parents Tommy always lingers more when they are home, even from a young age he learns to invite himself to dinner and sleepovers because of course they are polite, pleasant even when someone else is around, they will not risk someone overhearing them when one of them really lays into Steve. Tommy has definitely overheard them before when they are not aware he is there, when the company approved façade drops and they go mean and resentful of their own child. So Tommy shows up unannounced when he knows they are home, all sweet parent approved smiles as he worms his way into an invitation to come in. The tension relaxing out of Steve when he spots Tommy's freckled face giving him a private grin, knowing he is safe now.

Tommy does not understand what it is about Steve and dating that makes him uncomfortable at first. What about it makes him instantly suspicious of every girl he claims is sniffing around his best friend,

even if all she does is lend Steve a pencil. All he knows for sure is none of them are good enough for Steve and he has absolutely no qualms about telling him as much.

They always hurt him in one way or another and Tommy feels vindicated in his dislike of them. Always pushing at the insecurities Steve has from his parents. Reaffirming his own self-doubts with comments like "It's a good thing you're handsome" and "It's a good thing you're rich" Letting Steve get close only to leave him for someone else when they claim he is getting too clingy.

Tommy is always there to console him, glad the girls are gone even if he hates seeing Steve so down. Tommy usually spends the weekend attached to Steve's hip, getting them both high or drunk and more than welcoming Steve's need for cuddles. Tommy does not even need the puppy dog eyes, arms already out and waiting ready to comfort and protect Steve as much as he can.

Nothing changes when Tommy starts dating Carol except now someone is there to give him exasperated looks as he rambles on about Steve and his undeserving girlfriends. Carol does not mind, her own eyes wandering to other women when she thinks no one is watching, well aware of Tommy's little crush even if he is oblivious. Tommy is the perfect beard to present to her own folks and she is pretty sure there will not be any hard feelings once he figures out his one feelings.

She honestly thought Tommy would figure it out for himself but after two and a half years and three months of Steve's new relationship Tommy is worse than ever. Carol paints her nails while half paying attention to him bitch about Nancy for the millionth time.

Tommy cannot help it, he is the one who is supposed to be there for Steve not her, Carol's eyes only cut to him when she says "Ever thought maybe your problem is you want to date him." She is tired of waiting for him to figure it out on his own.

There is a lot of splattering and half worded denials before he settles heavily against the side of the bed silent. Carol just takes the opportunity to drag his hand up and paint his nails to match hers, the way she usually does to both him and Steve when they are all drinking together.

Tommy panics and tries to put distance between them, he does not jump in right away the next time someone starts a fight not until his gut twists unpleasantly as Steve ends up bloodied. He starts getting more belligerent about Nancy and making little digs, reacting in the worst way and forcing a wedge between them. Somehow he is shocked when Steve chooses Nancy over his friendship soured by Tommy's own stupidity. Even after they break up he does not come back to Tommy.

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"Why don't you try apologizing dumbass." Carol brings it up, tired of listening to Tommy bemoan his bad choices and worrying over Steve's health when he could just go talk to him.

"It's not that easy." Tommy hisses as they sit in the back of the ice cream parlor watching Steve and his associate work like they do every day since Carol first discovered Steve working here and by extension Robin.

"Totally is, he accepted my apology and he doesn't even have a crush on me." Billy quips startling Tommy, he had not even known Billy arrived, the table shakes as he settles heavily in the booth across from them. "Go talk to him dipshit, save us all the headache."

"See Billy agrees, now go." Tommy always forgets how strong Carol is but he is reminded as she presses both feet against his hips and pushes until he falls out of the booth. Tommy sputters and flails drawing the attention of Steve watching him with his head cocked and Tommy's hands are suddenly clammy as he shuffles toward the

front counter before he loses his nerve.

Technically he has been working up to this for months, it is why he and Carol keep coming to Scoops Ahoy, Billy tagging along on his breaks because he thinks the whole situation is funny alternating between teasing Tommy over his crush and Carol over her crush on Robin but he still feels unprepared when he makes it to Steve. Tommy is trying to will himself to say something instead of just staring but he is finding words hard, instead just drinking Steve in. "If you aren't going to order something stop loitering." Robin says suddenly right next to Steve and starring Tommy down with suspicion.

Steve for his part looks amused trying to hide a smile by biting his lip, not fooling anyone as Tommy turns a glare on Robin. "Is that anyway to speak to a paying customer?" Tommy hisses.

"After twenty minutes you're no longer considered a paying customer, now you're just loitering, company policy, got to keep seats open for paying customers." Robin says with a sharp grin and that does not sound right to Tommy but he does not know enough about Scoops Ahoy policy to actually argue.

Tommy scrunches his face up at her before turning his attention back to Steve. "Can we talk?"

"Oh God finally, he can go on break right now." Robin cuts in before Steve can even open his mouth going nervous as her whole demeanor shifts and she pushes him toward the back "Go take him to the breakroom and work your shit out I'm tired of hearing about it." She continues making hurrying motions at Tommy to follow him when he just stands there wondering what Steve has said about him.

He catches up to Steve quickly just barely catching the low mutter of "I listen to you talk about Carol" and Tommy plans to use that to his advantage later. Tommy glances back at Carol and Billy both

watching them not even trying to be subtle before he takes a big breath and walks through the flimsy door and runs right into Steve who stopped after barely getting into the room. They both nearly topple, both stumbling further into the room and Tommy instinctively reaching out and steadying Steve.

Tommy keeps a hold on Steve keeping them close together, close enough to feel the heat coming off his body as he turns to face him, close enough that Tommy can smell sweet cream on his breath from an afternoon snack as Steve licks over his bottom lip before pulling it between his teeth in a familiar nervous habit. Tommy barely even thinks about it before he is reaching up and tugging Steve's lip free, thumb soothing over it like he has done a thousand times but somehow it feels different, feels heated in a way it did not when Tommy was not actively aware of his feelings.

The heat dissipates some as apologies spill from both of their mouths at the same time, both rushed and broken, going silent as they stare at one another for a long moment before they both laugh softly foreheads pressing together gently for a moment. It starts building again as Tommy reaches up and hooks his fingers around the back of Steve's neck, drawing him back down as his thumbs stroke against the hinge of Steve's jaw. "Now that that is out of the way, there is just one more thing I need to clear up and then we can talk about whatever you want."

Tommy takes a deep nerve stealing breath, caught up in the way Steve big eyes dilate, the way his tongue flicks out over his bottom lip again before he finally leans in and presses their lips together. It is chased for a few moments before Steve sucks a little breath in, mouth parting slightly and Tommy takes the opportunity to slip his tongue in lest he spend his whole life wondering how it would feel once this is over. Steve makes a noise at the intrusion and Tommy is sure this is where it ends, that he is about to be rejected, until Steve's arms slide around his shoulders pulling him closer until there is no space between their body's and a tongue twines around his.

Feeling emboldened by Steve's response Tommy lets a hand drop from Steve's face to slide around his waist pulling them even closer as he dips his fingers under Steve's shirt only to be disappointed by a second shirt. The kiss breaks both of them panting into one another's mouths, pink cheeked and smiling. "Now what was it Robin wanted us to talk about." Tommy asks, tilting his head slightly to run his nose along Steve's.

"Uh actually this um, kind of satisfies that need I think." Steve admits cheeks going pinker as Tommy grins.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah but maybe we should do a little more *talking* just to be sure, my break is fifteen minutes after all, we still have some time." Tommy is not about to pass up the invitation to kiss Steve some more.

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Tommy does not stop hanging out at Scoops Ahoy after he and Steve make up and subsequently get together and he could not be happier but he would appreciate it if people would stop hitting on Steve. "Oh he's handsome, better watch out freckles." Billy teases from his left taking up Carol's usual spot, watching Tommy get his man emboldened her to finally make a move on Robin and the two of them are in back for Robin's break no doubt making out.

"Why are you here, aren't you supposed to be at work right now?" Tommy hisses distractedly elbowing Billy, eyes on Steve and the man leaned over the counter very obviously flirting with Steve.

"Had the day off figured I'd come watch you boil over with jealousy as people hit on your boyfriend, it's the height of entertainment in this hick town." Billy says as he elbows Tommy hard for his attempts

making him groan.

"Dick." Tommy mutters ignoring Billy's amused snort as he stands abruptly marching to the front counter when the man grabs a hold of Steve. "Is there a problem here?" Tommy hisses fists clenched at the tight lipped customer smile Steve is trying to keep up and the way that hand that does not belong on Steve visibly tightens.

"No I think he was just leaving, here's your cherry Garcia cone." Steve says tense as he thrusts the cone forward a drip just starting to fall down the waffle edge.

"See you tomorrow sailor." The man says in a promising tone that makes Tommy boil as he gives Steve's arm another squeeze before drawing his hand slowly down his arm, shooting Tommy a glare as he turns to leave.

"Well that was gross." Carol quips as she walks out of the backroom both her and Robin looking a little more ruffled then when they had entered.

"Steve's taking his break." Tommy says quickly, catching Steve's hand and dragging him in back when Robin just shrugs.

"Are you okay?" Tommy asks, fingers stroking over the flesh of Steve's forearm trying to wipe away the memory of that man's touch.

"I'm fine, he's here every day, usually he comes in the morning and Robin chases him off, he's creepy but harmless." Steve says, shrugging and flopping into a chair at the break table, Tommy following suit, sliding his chair across the linoleum until their sides are touching, hand still on Steve.

"You should quit." Tommy grumbles out, a thought he has had many times since he found out about Steve's job and saw his sailor outfit.

The women of Hawkins may not be interested in Steve in his tacky uniform but it is basically man bait, this is not the first time Tommy has caught some man being overly forward with Steve at work.

Steve lets out a long suffering sigh before pulling his arm free from Tommy's grip, pulling both onto the table and crossing them before letting his head flop into them. "Can't, dad's way of punishing me for not getting into any *acceptable* schools. He won't even pay for the state one unless I manage to keep this job and even then I have to figure out my own expenses. I can't quit, I need the money."

"Your dad is a prick." Tommy hisses anger boiling up in him because of course Steve's dad would do something like hold his future over him as a way of teaching him a lesson because he did not get into a school he approved of. "You know I'm going to state, we could always get a place together, share expenses." Tommy hedges with hope in his throat he has been thinking about asking since he and Steve got together. "My parents are getting me a place close to campus, one less expense you'd have to worry about." Tommy adds trying to seal the deal.

"Are you trying to use free rent as an excuse for us to move in together instead of just asking me?" Steve asks with a vulnerable little grin as he turns his head to look at Tommy.

"Yes, is it working?" Tommy asks, grin growing as Steve's smile brightens and he nods.

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"Robin, where is Steve? I thought you were coming together?" Tommy asks when he spots her, Carol abandoning their game to go greet her girlfriend. Tommy impatiently waits for them to finish kissing before asking again "Where is Steve?"

"Got dragged into the kitchen by some girl asking him if he knew how to tap a keg." Robin says with a shrug, rolling her eyes at Tommy's huffy behavior.

"And you just left him alone!"

"Dingus is a groan... he can kind of take care of himself." Tommy is pretty sure based on the giggle fit she dissolves into she is thinking about Steve getting himself locked in the freezer again. "He is a little drunk though so the odds are against him, he was nervous about the party so he was pregaming, I had to drive."

"Get me a fresh drink while you collect your boyfriend." Billy calls as Tommy marches toward the kitchen just barely missing hitting Tommy with his crumpled up beer can.

Tommy throws a muttered "asshole" over his shoulder, not stopping. When he gets into the kitchen he finds Tammy Thompson hanging off of Steve's arm while he tries to make a drink, the girl keeps tugging and making him spill soda over the counter.

"Tammy this would be easier if you weren't hanging off of me." Steve says a little slurred with a put upon sigh and Tommy feels pleased even as annoyance fills him as Tammy clings tighter.

"You always make the best drinks, I just want to see how you do it." Tammy simpers, pressing closer and Tommy has had enough and apparently so has Steve as he tries to extract himself.

"Pretty sure there isn't any skill involved in making a rum and coke." Steve says sounding exasperated, his whole demeanor changing as Tommy wedges himself between Steve and Tammy. "Tomcat!" Tommy grins as Steve throws his arms around his shoulders and he presses close.

"Hey Stevie, Tonya, been a while." Steve snicker pressing his face against Tommy's hair as Tammy sucks her teeth.

"You know my name is Tammy asshole." Tammy hisses, grabbing her drink and making some slosh out onto Tommy's sneaker as she slinks away.

"Having a good time Stevie?" Tommy asks, turning his attention to Steve as he turns his own arm circling his waist.

"Am now that you're here." Steve murmurs leaning down for a kiss that Tommy is more than happy to return.

"How about we get some drinks and join our friends?" Tommy asks as they break apart grinning as Steve rests his chin on his hair.

"Yeah that sounds good" Steve hums out pleasantly letting Tommy lead him around.

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Tommy is going to lose his damn mind finding out about the upside down and a secret underground Russian base all in one go. He was just hanging out with Billy and Carol, looking around the mall for Steve and Robin when Erica and Dustin had run up to them in a panic. Things sounded crazy and Tommy definitely did not believe them at first but taking the secret elevator full of toxic goo down to the secret underground base made it all a lot more believable.

Billy is taking everything better than he and Carol and after they make it out of this Tommy is going to get to the bottom of that. When they finally find Steve and Robin after burning a hole in the floor with some weird green goo, Tommy still has a lot of questions but none of them matter as he takes in Steve's swollen face, bleeding and bruised.

"Stevie, Stevie fuck are you okay?" Tommy asks as Carol checks on Robin and Billy squats next to their bound arms untying them, the kids on look out.

"Tomcat?" Steve's words are slurred, eyes hazy, whining a little when he tries to bring his arms up but cannot because Billy has not finished unbinding them yet. Tommy has to hold his arms still long enough for Billy to finish cutting through them and then Tommy finds himself with his arms full as Billy turns his attention to Robin's bindings.

"You came for me." Steve cries, teary face pressing into Tommy's neck as he stumbles back and they hit the ground.

"Of course I did Stevie, I'll always come for you." Tommy says earnestly and while he is angry at Steve for keeping all of this a secret but all of that pales in comparison to the relief of finding him only drugged and a little banged up and not hurt worse or dead.

"You're my hero." Steve says, still crying as Dustin scoffs from the door.

"It's not like he's the only one who came to rescue you, can you hurry it up this isn't exactly the place for this." Dustin whisper shouts from the door.

"For once curls is right, get him up so we can go freckles, you two can have the tearful reunion on the ride up." Billy quips ignoring the glare Dustin sends his way.

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"Let's go home Stevie?" Tommy asks coming over to the ambulance after answering a slew of questions to the authorities.

"You're not mad?" Steve asks softly, pulling the crinkling silver blanket tighter around his shoulders.

"I mean a little but after the government swooping in I get why you kept shit to yourself, but I was fucking scared. I can't protect you if I don't know what's going on. So no more secrets, okay?" Tommy asks, holding his hand out for Steve waiting for him to take it.

"Promise." Steve says softly, letting the blanket fall away and pushing forward by passing Tommy's hand to wrap around his neck in a tight hug. "Thank you for coming for me."

"Told you before I'll always come for you, you're mine to protect, been doing it since we were kids, no stopping me now."

Author's Note:

<https://ghostofjellyfishforgotten.tumblr.com/>